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ABSTRACT

Necessary changes or modifications that need to occur in social work education in order to facilitate both access to graduate study and relevance to rural characteristics and considerations are presented. Approaches that Schools of Social Work have taken in making their graduate programs more accessible are discussed. Among the issues raised are developing a curriculum plan, using local field resources, building in rural content, and ensuring adequate library resources. It is concluded that although there is no one "ideal model" available, there are a number of important factors that need to be considered in making curriculum and program modifications, e.g., an agreed upon educational plan, the availability of field practice away from the work setting but within the rural context, release time, arrangements to ensure richness and diversity of courses for specialization and concentration, and adequate library resources and experiences. (Author/BRR)

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by

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Knoxville, Tennessee

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Necessary changes or modifications that need to occur in social work education in order to facilitate both access to graduate study and relevance to rural characteristics and considerations are presented. Approaches that Schools of Social Work have taken in making their graduate programs more accessible are discussed. Such issues are raised as: developing a curriculum plan, using local field resources; building in rural content; and ensuring adequate library resources. It is concluded that although there is no one "ideal model" available there are a number of important factors that need to be considered in making curriculum and program modifications. These include an agreed upon educational plan, the availability of field practice away from the work setting but within the rural context, release time, arrangements to ensure richness and diversity of courses for specialization and concentration, and adequate library resources and experiences.

RURAL RESPONSIVENESS IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

I. Introduction

Social work's increasing involvement in the rural scene has been evidenced by MSW graduates migrating to rural settings, and an increasing number of BA level workers from various disciplines, employed in small town/rural settings, seeking graduate social work education. This involvement is seen in social work literature in that a significant number of articles, particularly papers presented at conferences, addressing issues of education for rural practice.[1] Support for specific rural training may be found in articles suggesting that social workers in rural areas face a number of different demands and stresses than those experienced by urban workers.[2] For example, professional isolation, high visibility, and wide ranging tasks are frequently cited as stresses and demands of the rural area.[3] Thus, social work educators are confronted with the basic questions of making graduate education accessible and addressing rural curriculum issues.

While there is increasing interest and involvement, access to social work education, especially at the graduate level, is becoming more difficult. This is partially based upon economics, with cutbacks in traineeships and loans, increases in tuition and fees, and persistent inflation. Social service workers, and other persons residing in rural locations, encounter added barriers to attending the more traditional on-campus program of two academic years of full time study. Some of these constraints relate to geographical distances from the main campus, to being "place bound" due to family, personal, and work requirements, and to limited opportunities available in making arrangements for graduate study.[4] Several brief vignettes serve to illustrate this problem.

Jerry S. is a local social welfare supervisor for a large State operated human services program. He is located in a small branch in a rural area located approximately 50 miles from a main university campus. He is married, has one child, has a BS degree with a major in sociology and approximately 10 years of full time work experience. He is the only supervisor that has major responsibility for various social services. He meets all the requirements for admission. Because of financial obligations, family responsibilities, and geographic location he is unable to attend a regular full-time graduate program. His agency will grant one day a week of release time, but only on a quarter to quarter basis.

Susan G. is a staff social worker in a community mental health center. The center is located in a small town of approximately 8,000, largely a farming community, located approximately 70 miles from the main university campus. Susan is single, has a BS degree with a major in psychology, and approximately 4 years experience at the mental health center. Her chief responsibility is direct services to a variety of patients. She is interested primarily in clinical practice and hopes to remain in the center. She meets all of the requirements for admission. Because of center policy she can secure only 1½ days of release time per week with the understanding that this will be made up in the evening hours.

Steve H. is a social worker in a rural health agency located 40 miles from the main university campus. He is married, has a BA degree with a major in sociology, and has worked at this agency for five years. He and another BA level worker work primarily in the area of home health care and placements. He meets all the requirements for admission. Because of work and family responsibilities he is unable to attend full time. His agency will not approve release time. He is interested in pursuing his degree in evenings, Saturdays, and "with annual leave days."

These summaries identify some of the issues faced by the rural social services worker wishing to pursue graduate education. Each of the individuals has different constraints. Most likely graduate schools would view the feasibility of master's level study differently for the respective situations. In any case, the problem is essentially two-fold: providing access to social work education to persons residing and working in rural

areas while also maintaining the integrity of the professional degree program; and modifying the curriculum to include essential rural content and dimensions.

The focus of this paper is the necessary changes or modifications that need to occur in social work education in order to facilitate both access to graduate study and relevance to rural characteristics and considerations.* In discussing these issues an important educational principle will be considered a guideline. This is that social work education as a professional discipline requires specific knowledge, skills, and values as prescribed and approved by the Council on Social Work Education (i.e., CSWE's curriculum policy statement and accreditation standards). As such, basic core and special content areas, analytic and interactive skills, professional socialization and acculturation experiences, and interaction with faculty and colleagues must be included at least at a minimally acceptable level to meet accreditation standards.

II. Approaches to Modifying Social Work Education

Schools of Social Work have demonstrated increasing efforts to make graduate programs more available and accessible to potential students who cannot attend full time and/or who cannot relocate to the University community.[5] A recent study by Frumkin revealed that approximately one-half of all Schools of Social Work have part-time, on-campus degree programs, and an additional thirty percent offer either a part-time off-campus program or are involved in both types of endeavors.[6]

These programs generally provide new educational opportunities for the individual living in a small town or rural area and represent various approaches or models that Schools are developing.[7] For the purpose of

*Emphasis will be placed on graduate social work education, although many of the issues and concerns are similar at the baccalaureate level.

this paper these approaches will be described as: the feeder model; the out-in approach; total off-campus; part-time variation; and individual accomodation.

Feeder Model. In these programs a school generally provides off-campus classwork and field practicum during the first year of graduate study. Courses are often offered on weekends or evenings. The first year curriculum may be extended over a two year period. Students are then expected to complete the second year of the curriculum in full-time residency on campus. In essence this approach allows students to begin on a part-time basis in an off-campus location, with faculty commuting to the off-campus site. Library resources in the off-campus location and/or school furnished duplicated materials are used. Students take core courses, usually two each quarter or semester, on Saturday and/or during a late afternoon or evening. Most students continue their employment with or without release time. Field practice is usually arranged near the geographical location of the students, with agreements reached concerning release time from work, field practicum location, and specific learning needs.

Out and In Model. In these programs students take a number of courses and field practicum off-campus but may commute to the campus at least one day per week for specialization course work or defined learning opportunities. These may be divided in terms of the student taking one year completely off-campus then taking some course work on campus during a second year, and then returning to the community for a third year. This model is different from the feeder approach in that it generally does not require the student to be on campus for the full-time second year of the curriculum.

Total Off-Campus. These programs are designed whereby all requirements are completed away from the main campus. Residency requirements are often met by scheduling courses to meet the minimum equivalent of full-time study. Usually there is a resident director and faculty located in the branch or community based program, although not as extensive as on the main campus. The operation can be a permanent branch or a mobile program; however, it is administered by and part of the on-campus social work program and university.

Part-time Variation. This program allows students to commute to campus generally on one or two days a week. Scheduling allows students to take required courses during this compact period of time. Often field practice is arranged in an agency closer to the place of residency.

Individual Accommodation. This approach combines elements of the previously described programs. These variations may be in terms of scheduling or time factors, or full and part-time variations. An individual plan for each student is designed.

In all of the above models, residency requirements are generally met through planning three consecutive quarters or two semesters of full-time study. For example, whereas the on-campus student in full-time study would generally take up to 15 quarter hours, the university requirement for full-time graduate study may be a minimum of 9 credit hours; the part-time student through classroom and field can generally put together 3 consecutive quarters of 9 hours each to have the equivalent of a year's residency. This allows a school to meet accreditation standards for residency.

The choice of a model for providing graduate education to rural practitioners depends in large part upon student need/demand and adequacy/ability of school resources to maintain a quality on-campus program while diverting existing and/or perhaps new resources to this development. For example,

if there is a sufficient number of potential students (12-15) in a rural setting, perhaps in several neighboring small towns, and if a school has sufficient resources to extend out, then the feeder model, the out-in model, or total off-campus approach may be feasible. These three approaches do require a progressive increase of faculty time and use of other resources, (i.e., support staff, operating funds), with the need to have a sufficient number of students to ensure a cost effective program. On the other hand, the more isolated in terms of distance from campus and distances between students the less feasible these models become in terms of program and cost effectiveness factors. Part-time variations and individual accommodation approaches can be used in these more isolated situations, but a great deal of faculty advising and coordination are necessary. The following chart depicts the requirements placed upon faculty and students in these approaches. The demand degree factor is considered as high (H), medium (M), or low (L) for the first and second years of the curriculum.

Requirement/Demand Factor*

Approach	Faculty Time	Travel Student-Faculty		Need for Release Time	Need for Additional Library Resources	Number of Students Needed
Feeder	H/L	L/H	H/L	L/H	H/L	H/L
Out-In	H/L	L/H	H/L	L/H	H/L	H/L
Total Off-Campus	H/H	L/L	H/H	M/M	H/H	H/H
Part-time Variation	M/M	H/H	L/L	M/M	M/M	L/L
Individual Accommodation	M/M	H/H	L/L	M/M	M/M	L/L

*The numerator represents the first curriculum year, the denominator the second curriculum year. (Note: curriculum years rather than the calendar years).

As one can observe from this chart there are both faculty and student demands to any of the approaches used. Faculty requirements/demands and resources needed are increased as the program module moves off campus. Student requirements/demands are increased as the program remains on the main campus and in one central location. The "out-in" model tends to provide accommodation for both faculty and students in the requirements/demands needed to successfully complete the graduate program, and presents educational advantages since there are both off-campus and on-campus components. It should be noted that when the total off-campus program becomes a permanent and established one, such as a fully implemented branch, it takes on the characteristics of a small semi-autonomous School. The demand factors in this situation would be similar to a regular on-campus program.

The foregoing indicates that Schools have developed various models for off-campus programs and it is possible to identify characteristics and requirements of the respective models. However, the major issue of effectiveness of the models has not been adequately addressed. Schools have described and reported on their programs, and some have conducted in-house evaluations.[8] There remains a critical need for rigid, large scale evaluations to determine effectiveness and to determine if off-campus programs are of equal quality to on-campus programs. Likewise, independent research must examine the limits of variations, such as correspondence courses.[9]

III. Issues Related to Responsiveness

While these models do provide some flexibility in providing social work education, a number of issues and problems remain. Some students regardless of the approach will continue to experience difficulty in

accessibility to graduate social work education, and those who are employed often experience problems in securing release time, especially when travel time must be taken into account. Thus it is critical that schools accept the fact that not all students can be accommodated; otherwise educational quality will be compromised. Regardless of the approach a school finally selects, certain critical factors should be considered. These include: developing a curriculum plan; using local field resources; building in rural content; and ensuring adequate library resources. Each of these factors merit comment.

Developing a Curriculum Plan. The importance of a curriculum plan recognizes and emphasizes curriculum integrity. Some programs may have the same curriculum for all students in a class; however, the choice of specializations, concentrations, electives, time of field, and other factors that allow variation between students necessitate individual plans. The curriculum plan, whether for a class or individual student, recognizes pre-requisites, logical sequencing, and recommended electives.* It is essential that the course offerings including field are consistent and recognize the same pre-requisites, sequencing, and requirements of the basic accredited program. The education plan ensures that these factors are taken into consideration in the School's scheduling and students' registration for classes and field. Certain on-campus courses for full-time students may need to be offered at times convenient for commuters.

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*This plan which is developed prior to starting the programs and projects course and field work leading to graduation, may also be important in securing release time, in that it provides the student and agency a clear picture of time away from the agency. Too frequently agencies withdraw support from their employees in part-time study, explaining, "We had no idea they would be away this much." Experience at the University of Tennessee School of Social Work has shown that interviews with part-time applicants in which the student's responsibility to clear total program release time is emphasized, reduced the dropout rate significantly.

In addition to maximizing the use of faculty teaching time by reducing the need for special sections, courses enrolling both on-campus and off-campus students provide opportunities for mutual learning while expanding professional socialization opportunities for both.

The education plan is a means of identification and examination of such relevant factors as use of outside faculty, the mode of course delivery, and availability of electives. For those developing graduate programs in the rural setting a number of temptations are faced including heavy use of local practitioners as part-time instructors, reducing library and reading assignments, and cutting corners on other requirements. In reality, a sound program for rural practitioners whether on campus or off-campus will require additional resources, including greater advising and tracking, and perhaps some curriculum modifications.

The mode of delivery of courses, i.e., the use of correspondence courses, video taping and phone conferences can present judgment questions with regard to appropriateness and timing as well as what content or modules can be taught by these methods. Another curriculum problem relates to the availability of electives and specialization courses if the program is taught entirely away from the main campus. It is understandable that a wider range of courses and faculty resources are available on campus, and frequently this is the reason why at least a portion of the educational program is required to be on campus or in residence.

Some of these issues are ones that are common to both rural and urban settings and are more directly related to the non-traditional student, or to situations that present barriers to graduate social work education opportunities. These issues must be addressed prior to the implementation of the program. Likewise, in approaching this task, it is essential to remember that despite innovative planning it is not going to be possible

to provide graduate social work education to all applicants, and when we go over the line, sound academic planning and educational quality are going to be compromised.

Using Local Field Resources. A second issue is securing field placements that meet learning objectives and provide opportunities for professional socialization. In all of the models noted above, it is possible to plan field placements in the rural setting closer to the place of residence. However, there are several problems that may be encountered in developing these placement experiences. The rural setting does not have the wealth of agencies that may be considered for field placements and there is not as much flexibility in arranging special hours (evenings and weekends) for field study.

In developing a rural field placement, it is critical that the placement allows the student to learn the professional social work role. It has been recognized that one of the major characteristics of rural practice is the high degree of visibility, and casual and informal relationships between various agencies and program staffs. These factors may hinder professional development of the student in a rural setting in which he/she and role are known and expected. The placement should provide opportunity to experience the student role and professional development as separate from employment and other role responsibilities.

One important aspect of a field placement in the rural setting, whether it be for the on-campus student who is preparing for rural practice or the rural-based practitioner who is pursuing graduate study, is that the placement be over an extended period of time. It is only with this time that the rich variety of cases and opportunities can be developed, the cultures and values of the region experienced, and the social change occurring in the rural area be recognized. A number of experiences, many

of which rural residents are exposed to daily and often take for granted, should be highlighted and examined in the field practicum. The field practicum should provide opportunity to understand and incorporate rural characteristics into practice without contaminating or manipulating them. For example, the concept of natural support systems is heavily used in the literature and emphasized as an important part of the interventive activities. The field placement should provide an opportunity to learn how to utilize these systems in professional practice. Likewise, a number of experiences that will be a part of on-going professional practice should be built into field, including: treatment of a variety of clients; case sharing with other agencies; interdisciplinary experience (especially with public health nurses and others who take a major role in rural settings); opportunity to supervise/work with non-professionals; and consultation with a variety of settings/requests.

An issue that needs to be clearly understood in field planning is that of education vs. apprenticeship. Often the potential student and/or the employing agency will regard the workplace as the only realistic setting for field practicum, which frequently has constraints related to opportunities for experiences separate from work and for integration of classroom and field. Placement in the agency of employment or in an agency that duplicates employment, i.e., matching educational training activities with the work setting, may be described as a trap that looms in rural field practice. In other words developing skills that "fit in" with one's position in a rural agency must not be at the expense of professional and academic identity. Graduate education is not simply teaching one to do their present job, but rather it is a combination of developing understanding of research and theory, building professional practice skills, and the knowledge/abilities required by agencies.

Building in Rural Content. The third issue is that of rural content. The school must decide whether to "add on", "build in" or substitute rural content in the existing curriculum. In considering this question it is important to recognize that certain courses of study are appropriate for social workers in both urban and rural practice. Included would be principals of interviewing, relationship building, assessment, and interventive strategies. The key factor is knowing how to translate and modify these principles and approaches in a rural practice setting.[10]

The profession has tended to widely accept the notion that the generalist is the most appropriate approach for rural practice.[11] There may be a pitfall here in that while there are not enough specialized services in rural areas, the continued emphasis and preparation of generalist may only serve to prolong this basic problem. It has also been argued that such an orientation does not adequately recongize that most social workers in rural areas will primarily engage in direct services.[12] The need for direct service preparation is supported, for example, by a study of training needs of Title XX providers that strongly suggests that training related to counseling is the highest priority need in rural areas.[13] Rural communities have shown marked development in recent years of more specialization and diversity as evidenced by community mental health centers and other social service and health support agencies and programs.

While recognizing the need for client services skills, it is not necessary to rule out opportunity to specialize in administration and planning. If a school offers this specialization in its on-campus program, then it should be possible to provide the same specialization to rural located students. The models that build in more on-campus experiences (feeder and out-in) can more easily accommodate specialization. At the same time, regardless of the model, the field experience should play

a major role in providing specialization.

The question of specialization aside, there are a number of rural characteristics and issues that demand attention. These include: rural social change; rural services delivery; and rural lifestyle. There is an increasing amount of literature and research that describes the "new rural scene," the effort to develop comprehensive rural services, and changing rural lifestyles that can be incorporated into human behavior, practice, policy and research courses.[14] Essentially, rural content can be incorporated through the design of the field practicum and course materials.

Beyond this, one approach is to consider the delivery of rural social services as a "concentration" of study using both core and specialization content. In our School a concentration is defined as a minimum of two elective courses, a field practicum in the specified area, and a curriculum supported statement of goals, objectives, and content. This helps to integrate rural content throughout the curriculum.

Ensuring Library Resources. A fourth and final factor for consideration is ensuring library resources and experiences. The use of copies, purchasing books, professors' lending references, and audiotapes are efforts to deal with the issues; they do not replace library experiences. "The day has not yet come when electronic information transmission and inter-library loans can adequately replace student access to shelves of books and journals for specific research, reading assignments and general or casual personal perusal."[15] Thus, programs must plan and/or develop library accessibility. Most rural students have access to at least a local library, however, then often fall short of providing an adequate professional resource collection. Therefore, just as courses are built into the Students'

educational schedule, adequate library time must be planned. This usually entails the expectation that the student will plan library time when on campus and commute to campus especially for library study (university libraries tend to maintain generous weekend/evening hours). At the same time, the school of social work can often develop cooperative relationships with libraries closer to the student; for example, numerous small private and state colleges that may not have a social work program have a good basic library.

IV. Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has identified several educational models or approaches and examined a number of issues regarding social work education for rural settings. What conclusions can be drawn? Perhaps the most obvious is that there is no one "ideal" model or one super curriculum for schools and students. Schools must make decisions on the basis of their respective resources and needs. At the same time, it could be appropriately concluded that regardless of model, an ideal approach would contain a number of key characteristics/factors. An agreed upon educational plan, the availability of field practice away from the work setting but within the rural context, release time, arrangements to ensure richness and diversity of courses for specialization and concentration, and adequate library resources and experiences would be some of these. In addition, while some courses and activities would be delivered in the rural setting, other courses and activities would remain on campus to enhance socialization and acculturation as well as to provide exposure to the many educational resources available on a university campus.

Since social work education is a combination of knowledge, skills, and values, there are limits or boundaries that have to be established to assure standards of quality and levels of expectation. Social work

education be can be responsive to rural needs, while at the same time the rural context can add contributions to more effective and relevant social work education and practice.

[1]Roger M. Nooe and Floyd H. Bolitho, "An Examination of Rural Social Work Literature: Implications for Social Work Research and Education," paper presented at the Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting, Louisville, Kentucky, March, 1981.

[2]R. T. Riggs and L. S. Cugel, "Transition from an Urban to Rural Mental Practice," Social Casework, Vol. 57, No. 9, 1976, pp. 562-567.

[3]H. R. Huessy, "Tactics and Targets in the Rural Settings," in S. E. Golann and C. Eisdorfer, Eds. The Handbook of Community Mental Health (New York; Appleton Century Crafts, 1971).

[4]Ben P. Granger, "Meeting the Challenge of Off-Campus Social Work Study Programs," in Social Work in Rural Areas: Issues & Opportunities, in J.S. Davenport and J.R. Wiebler, Eds., Social Work in Rural Areas, Laramie, Wyoming, Office of Conferences and Institutes, the University of Wyoming, 1980.

[5]See: Anne Gero, "Part-time Social Work Education: A Model to Ameliorate the Diminishing Number of Women in Leadership Positions." Paper presented at the Annual Program Meeting, CSWE, 1981. Robert Salmon & Joel Walker, "The One-Year Residency Program: An Alternative Path to the Masters Degree in Social Work," Hunter College, 1979, mimeo. Barbara Starr, "A Combined On and Off Campus MSW Program for Community Practitioners," paper presented at Annual Program Meeting, CSWE, 1981.

[6]Michael Frumkin, Ben P. Granger, "Alternative Social Work Education: Status, Issues, and Directions," paper presented at the Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting, Louisville, Kentucky, March, 1981.

[7]Ernest N. Gullerud, "From the Ivory Tower to the Practice Community: Three Approaches for Off-campus Social Work Education Practice." Journal of Continuing Social Work Education, Vol. I, No. 1, Winter, 1981.

[8]See: Ursula C. Gerhart, "Evaluation of the Part-time Program of the Graduate School of Social Work," Rutgers University, mimeo, 1979. Betty York, "The Off-Campus Alternative for Graduate Social Work Education, paper presented at the 1977 Annual Program Meeting, CSWE, 1979. Dorothy A. Miller & L. C. Wolfe, "Off-Campus Education in Social Work: The Kentucky Experience," University of Kentucky, 1981. Gerald W. Boynton (Ed.), "Moving Ahead in the 80's: Issues for Part-time Social Work Education," Proceedings of the First Annual Part-time Social Work Education Colloquium. West Virginia College of Graduate Studies Foundation, 1981.

[9]John W. Hanks. "To the Editor," NASW News, February, 1981.

[10]The appropriateness of basic principles being applicable to urban or rural is evidenced in particular content areas also. For example, see: C. Eisdorfer, J. Altrocebi, and R. F. Young, "Principles of Community Mental Health in a Rural Settings: Halifax County Program," Community Mental Health Journal, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1968), pp. 211-220. Likewise, a survey of rural physicians indicates that other professions recognize basic knowledge being transposed to the rural setting, see: K. E. Callen and D. David, "What Medical Students Should Know about Psychiatry: The Results of a Survey of Rural General Practitioners," American Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 135, No. 2 (1978), pp. 243-244. Also, see: Roger M. Nooe,"Clinical Social Work Practice in Rural Areas," paper presented at CSWE Annual Program Meeting, Los Angeles, 1980.

[11]L. H. Ginsberg, Social Work in Rural Communities, A Book of Readings (New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1976).

[12]Roger M. Nooe, "Clinical Social Work Practice in Rural Areas"

[13]R.L. Edwards, G. Kurtz, and N. S. Dickinson, "Identifying Training Needs and Developing a Training Response to Rural Social Workers and Title XX Provider Agencies," in J. Davenport, III, J. S. Davenport, J. R. Wiebler, eds., Social Work in Rural Areas. Laramie, Wyoming, Office of Conferences and Institutes, The University of Wyoming, 1980.

[14]See, for example: H. Wayne Johnson, (ed.) Rural Human Services: A Book of Readings (Itasca, Ill: Peacock, 1980); J. W. Flax, M. C. Wagenfeld, R. E. Ivens and R. J. Weiss, Mental Health and Rural America: An Overview and Annotated Bibliography (Rockville, MD., National Institute of Mental Health, 1979). Also Nooe and Bolitho, op cit.

[15]Roger M. Nooe and David P. Fauri, "Part-time Study for the Master of Social Work Degree: A Program Checklist," CSWE Occasional Paper Series, 1979.